

Will Martial Law Actually Protect Christians?

The Filipino military declared a brief ceasefire Sunday, allowing Muslims to peacefully celebrate the end of Ramadan. The lull in the fighting also allowed for the rescue of six civilians trapped in the city of Marawi.

Government forces are forging progress toward peace, but it's slow-going. Earlier last week, about 200 suspected members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) took hostages and holed up for hours inside a school, then took five civilians with them after fleeing. Some say the attack could be a diversion for the Islamic State to gain more ground in Marawi.

"That is a common perception because the BIFF is sympathetic to the radical group," says Herman Moldez with Asian Access, an organization that trains and equips Christian leaders throughout Asia. "In fact, there had been some effort for reinforcement coming from Salou and these areas, and so one of the reasons for the declaration of martial [law] of the entire [island of] Mindanao is for the military to be able to respond quickly and not to complicate the whole matter in Marawi City."

Moldez recently visited Zamboanga City on the island of Mindanao. He says that for the most part, violence isn't affecting Christians or impeding their efforts in spreading the gospel.

"It's very, very safe. Christian communities are very safe. [The violence] is only in Marawi City, really," Moldez says. "They feel safe because the military is just there to protect and to monitor people coming in and going out."

"It's not interfering, because they are minorities, and

they're up on the mountains. So we are not yet feeling or experiencing what ISIS is doing in other countries."

"They may be safe for now, but Moldez says it would be unwise for Christians to let down their guard.

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“So pray for vigilance. That’s our prayer, that not only the Christian community, but even the Muslim community, will continue to be vigilant. I think the majority of the Muslim communities want to have the peace process with the government to be established.” {eo}

This article originally appeared on Mission Network News.